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LITERATURE DEPARTMENT

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Board of Home Missions and the Woman's Executive Committee of the Presbyterian Church,

156 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY.

PITCHERS vs. LAMPS.

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This particular pitcher was old-fashioned, awkward, and ugly enough to gratify any æsthetic taste. If it held a lamp, Mrs. Lander did not know it. She was enraptured when she discovered it in a down-town crockery store, and having "purchased it at a bargain" by paying three times what it was worth, carried it home to decorate it and make it more æsthetic and ugly still; for Mrs. Lander was not yet a proficient in ceramic art. But she intended to be, and she had decided that as soon as the pitcher should be completed she would purchase other pieces sufficiently unlike it to make a set.

She was absorbed in her occupation when the door-bell rang, and Bridget's head inserted itself at the partly open door.

"A lady to see you ma'am."

"Book agent, I suppose," sighed Mrs. Lander, laying down her brush reluctantly.

But instead of one of that much abused class, the caller proved to be a bright-eyed, earnest-faced lady, with a request that Mrs. Lander would entertain one or more delegates to the Woman's Missionary Convention.

"Perhaps we may have already secured places enough, but it is sure to be a large and enthusiastic meeting, you know."

Mrs. Lander did not know anything about it. She had heard something, to be sure, but it was forgotten as soon as heard. Mrs. Lander never attended missionary meetings. Years before, when she was a young girl, she had gone regularly to the monthly concert in the old church at home, for the very good reason that her parents believed in it, and never inquired whether she did or not. If those monthly concerts had been expressly designed to awaken in the ordinary mind a desire not to know anything about missions, they could scarcely have been more successful. They were always held in the afternoon, when the old church looked greyer and grimmer than ever. Most of the people stayed away, and the few who came scattered themselves so widely through the church as to add to its deserted and forlorn appearance. There was no sermon—"a little talk would do well enough for monthly concerts." They always sang "From Greenland's Icy Mountains," which was the only cheerful feature of the occasion. The "heathen were not individualized, but served and swallowed in one indigestible mass." Then some good brother prayed that "the watchmen on Zion's walls

might see eye to eye"—what that might mean Mrs. Lander had not the faintest idea—and that "the islands of the sea might be speedily converted," with no definite conception in his own mind, or that of any one else, what those islands were or where they were located. And then everybody went home, thankful that the dull duty was over for one month more.

In view of these early experiences, a missionary meeting was not an enticing prospect to Mrs. Lander. She did not positively determine that she would never go to them—it is not always comfortable to be too honest, even with one's self—she only told herself that she was too busy. Fortunately, however, people did not all think alike, and there were ladies of more than ordinary intelligence and of high social rank who seemed really interested in such matters. She had noticed that fact with secret wonder, and there was something of the same wonder in her eyes as she surveyed her bright-faced caller. It would be pleasant to oblige these ladies, and, moreover—human motives being usually somewhat mixed—she reflected that her front chamber was lovely in its new furniture of crimson and grey, and it was a pity not to have some one see it! So she graciously consented to receive a delegate, and went back to her pottery with a complacent feeling of having fulfilled her missionary duty at last.

On the bright morning following there were three people at three different points of the compass, who had each an appointed work to do without in the least knowing what it was

to be—an old woman with a rusty satchel, a boy with a stone, and a lady with a sick headache. The old woman with the satchel thought she knew her errand perfectly. She had planned, all the time she was knitting stockings and selling eggs, to earn the money for this great event of her life—going up to the Woman's Missionary Convention in the city. Her daughter-in-law thought it "all nonsense for mother to go off alone so among strangers." But the old grey head shook a decided negative. She wanted to hear from those fresh from the field how the King's armies were advancing, and where the royal banner was planted.

"I want the refreshin' to my own soul," she said. "And if David could go up to hear, and to carry a little parched corn, in his day, I guess I can go with my little offering now."

The boy with the stone had no idea of a mission. He had picked up the stone and put it in his pocket to consort with a broken knife, some rusty nails, three marbles, a bit of chewing gum, a leathern sling and an old padlock. That stone might prove a convenient article if he should come across a dog, a window, or something else that did not need to be hit; and, meanwhile, it was just as valuable as the other treasures he had accumulated.

The lady with the headache was in dire dismay, because she thought her mission ended when the headache began. She was one of the prime movers and directors of the convention. Head and hands had been busy with it for weeks. And now on this important day,

when she particularly desired to be at her post to assign strangers who came unannounced to the places held in reserve, this distracting pain kept her a prisoner at home. It must get better! She could not be sick, she declared. But it was one of those persevering, unreasonable, not-to-be-argued-out-of-the-matter headaches that all nervous women know, and of course it was victorious. The hot head sank helplessly on its pillow at last, and with an odd little compromise between a groan and a laugh the lady gave up her contest.

"It is of no use. The world did exist after a fashion before I came into it, so I suppose it may be possible for it to move on for one day longer, even if I am kept out of it. I must accept your offer, Bob. Go and do your best."

Bob was a young gentleman with the kindest heart, the best intentions, and the least tact imaginable. He was home on a college vacation, and had offered to take his mother's place for the day, and fulfill the duties to the best of his ability. Very fine ability, too, Mr. Bob privately considered it, though he did not discover much room for its exercise in a position like this. In his secret heart he wondered why his mother and the other ladies should make so much fuss over so very simple a matter.

"Easiest thing in the world," said Mr. Bob, looking at a new arrival and then at his list. "Here's a delegate that wants a place, and here's a place that will take a delegate. Put them together and it's a fit." And he fitted

them without once perceiving, in his masculine obtuseness, that the place was gilt-edged and the delegate was not.

That was the way in which it happened that the old woman with the antiquated bonnet, the coarse shawl, and the rusty satchel suddenly appeared at Mrs. Lander's. To say that that lady was surprised at the apparition would but feebly express her sentiments. Her opinion of things that fitted differed materially from Mr. Bob's; and when she had ushered that bonnet, shawl, and black alpaca dress into her grey and crimson guest chamber, she closed the door upon the contrast and said, "Well!!!" in a tone that suggested three exclamation points at the least.

As for the old lady, she was innocently and heartily delighted. She laid aside her wraps, brushed the dust from her despised bonnet, carefully folded the much criticised shawl, and then looked about her with a contented smile on her wrinkled, kindly face.

"I do b'lieve this convention is going to be a little bit of heaven to me, clear through," she said, softly. "To think of my being in a room like this! I wonder if David and Billy know?"

Whatever were Mrs. Lander's views of missionary meetings, decorative art, or the wisdom of entertaining committees, she was a lady, and, having received her guest, she accorded her due courtesy. So, when dinner was announced, the well-preserved alpaca, brightened by a fresh collar, was not made to seem out of place at the elegant table, and the old lady

ate and chatted in happy unconsciousness of self, and enjoyment of her surroundings.

"Yes, I think it does us good to get away from home, once in a while, out of our own little corner, and see what the rest of the Father's children are doing, don't you? I'd like to have been here in time for the morning meeting, but I started long before five o'clock as it was. They had a real good one, didn't they?"

"I did not go," answered Mrs. Lander, and then, as the eyes fastened upon her looked such unfeigned surprise that any one already in the city should miss such opportunity, she hastens to add the statement she always made to herself, "I had not time."

The kindly eyes wandered around the pleasant room in quick appreciation of its many demands.

"I s'pose it does keep you pretty busy," she assented, with a faint undertone of regret in her voice.

But who, with a soul for art, likes to be considered merely a housekeeper? Mrs. Lander did not, and, as soon as they were in the cosy back parlor, she pointed out the pitcher on its little stand by the window, waiting a few finishing touches.

"That is my work," she said.

Then, indeed, the old eyes brightened into gladness, for their owner thought she understood it all. Was she not in a Christian home, where all gifts were consecrated? Were not the hearts around her in full sympathy with the great cause of missions? Why else would

she be here? That bit of work touched a quickly responsive chord, and her tongue was loosened at once.

"And that's what you do? Ain't it pretty? I expect, now, you can make a great deal that way, and ain't it a blessed thing to do? Of course, you could give a great deal without doing any such work, but it makes all the more. It's good to think how many's a-working—one in one way, and another in another—all for the same thing. When I get back home again, and am drying apples and sewing carpet-rags, and counting how many shillings it'll bring, I'll be glad to think about your pretty work that'll earn dollars, and how the dollars and shillings'll go to build up the same kingdom. I'd like to tell you how it come to me."

"Yes," answered Mrs. Lander uncertainly, and she could say nothing more. There was a queer feeling at her heart, as if a searching eye had been suddenly turned upon it, and an authoritative voice demanding, "How much owest thou my Lord?" had found her bankrupt.

"There was no one left but my husband, and Billy, and me," said the old woman. "All the children married and gone, you see. Billy was my grandson, and we did set a store by him—me and his grandpa, both. We lived in the country, a little place on the edge of the prairie, and we thought we had hard times—we thought we had. We got to thinking too much about our own wants, and what we couldn't have, and working just for ourselves, you see. We wanted to do for Billy, and give him good schoolin'. He was as chirk and

bright a little fellow as ever was, and good, too. But coats and shoes and books do cost a good deal, even if you don't get 'em extry fine, and so Billy says to me one vacation, 'Grandma, I have found something I can do up at the station, and they'll pay me for it, too. That'll help.' 'Twas the railroad station he meant, right at the edge of the village near us. He started off the next morning, brave as you please, with his little dinner basket in his hand. I can see him yet! But it was only three days before he was brought home all white and crushed—one leg cut off by the cars.

"That was trouble! But Billy bore it like a hero. He'd say, 'Cheer up, grandma; there's lots of things a boy with only one leg can do.' Them was long days, though, in that lonesome little house, and I don't know how we would have got along if it hadn't been for the reading. There was a Bible and a pile of papers that had been sent us—missionary heralds and such. That was how it begun, for the more we read in the Bible, the more we see how precious it was, and the more we read in the papers, the more we see how hard it was for them that didn't have it. That was the first time the heathen ever seemed like folks to me, and the missionaries like our next-door neighbors. Well, we grew interested, we did, and one day Billy says to me, 'Anyhow, one boot can go to the other boys now.' I didn't know what he meant, but he said he couldn't wear but one boot at a time any more, and the price of the other could go to help some of the poor folks in Indy or Chiny, or out West.

"That was how we begun to lay up a little to send away, and the more we worked and saved, the more we cared. It's surprisin' how much you get to think of any one when once you begin to do for 'em. Sometimes I most think the Lord Jesus couldn't love us so if He hadn't done so much for us. Well, Billy got up again, and went round on crutches, but some way he never seemed to get strong. He couldn't do things he planned, and by and by the fever took him. His life just burned away then. He'd laid still a good while one day—it was one winter afternoon, with the sun shining bright into the room—and we thought he didn't know us and wouldn't ever speak again. But, all at once, his eyes opened wide and bright, and, says he, 'Grandma, the other boy can have both boots now.' And he never said any more, but I knew what he meant.

"So husband and me, we agreed that what we'd have done and spent for Billy, we'd give to the 'other boys,' as he called 'em, and it sort of comforted us; we called it sendin' the money to Billy. When there'd came a call from Indy, I'd say, 'Can we spare the boy a coat?' and when we'd hear of hard times on the frontier, David would say, 'I reckon we must manage a pair of boots for the boy.' 'Twas our way of puttin' it, you see.

"But after three or four years, David went, too. When I see that was a coming, I thought I'd nothing to live for, and I said there'd be nobody left. 'Yes there will,' says David, 'there'll be everybody—all the brothers and sister's we've been working for so long. Do

all you can for them, wife, and never you fear but I'll know you've help 'em when I see 'em coming home one by one. I think I must know that even in heaven,' says he. So I've done what I could, and it's kept me up many a time. Brothers and sisters, and the Lord's brothers and sisters, too—every one that learns to 'do the will of the Father'—he says so. I couldn't do nice things like you, but I've raised chickens and braided mats and sewed carpet-rags. Coming up to this meeting seems most like a little bit of heaven to me. I do hope David and Billy know."

The rough, brown hands dropped idly on the old alpaca dress, but they did not look coarse and ugly to Mrs. Lander. A moment's silence fell over the room; and then up the street came that appointed boy with his predestined stone, aimed at the Maltese cat sitting comfortably in the open window, and, missing her, crushed that precious pitcher to atoms. The boy ran, and there was a startled cry from the two ladies, but the tears in Mrs. Lander's eyes, as she gathered up the fragments, were not altogether due to the accident.

"Never mind, dear. The Lord can bring good out of it some way," said the old voice, soothingly, and Mrs. Lander answered softly:

"I think He will. I am going to the meeting with you this afternoon."

It is needless to state that the meeting that afternoon was not like the old monthly concerts. There were eager young hearts, on the eve of departure for foreign fields, who said: "Call it no sacrifice. We go joyfully." There

were grey-haired veterans, home on furlough, who told of battles past. And as she listened to it all, catching from this height a glimpse of the grand army of workers marshalling from every village, town and hamlet, and reaching from the darkest corners of earth up to the gates of the dear Home City, Mrs. Lander forgot that this was a missionary meeting, and that she didn't like missionary meetings, and that she didn't believe in women speaking in public, but finding herself on her feet, told the story of her pitcher, and pledged herself to the cause.

"Now, if that ain't just like Gideon's army!" exclaimed the old woman from her corner. "She had a lamp all the time, but it couldn't shine till it was out of the pitcher."

"Even so," answered the clear voice of the leader. "All over this fair land of ours, hidden in pitchers of selfishness, of indolence, of fashion and of pleasure are the lights that should be shining brightly for the Master and carrying good cheer to the ends of the earth. Oh, sisters of mine, let us pray for the breaking of the pitchers!"

[*Copied from "The Interior."*]

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